

he referred to Dawn Foreman, Tracy Toth, and Melissa Eckert, daughters of Mr. Toth.

Remarks on Presenting the National Teacher of the Year Award

April 23, 2001

The President. Thank you all very much. Welcome to the Rose Garden. I was wondering if it was ever going to get warm in Washington. *[Laughter]* It does.

Mr. Secretary, thank you, and thanks for your kind introduction and thanks for your service to the children of our country. I don't know if you know this or not, but just last week in Monticello, Mississippi, there was a school named in Rod's honor. It's the school he attended as a young man.

What makes the story interesting is that students of his generation were segregated by race. No more in this great land called America. The Rod Paige Middle School will know loud and clear that education breaks down any barrier to success. Mr. Secretary, you're a role model for students across America, and for a couple of adults, as well.

Education Secretary Roderick R. Paige. Well, thank you. Thank you.

The President. And I'm proud to have you on my team.

Secretary Paige. Thank you.

The President. I'd like to thank the Council of Chief State School Officers, Scholastic, Inc., and the National Selection Committee for organizing this event. You've done a splendid job.

And I want to welcome to the White House, Peter McWalters, president of the Council of Chief State School Officers, and Gordon Ambach, its executive director. And I also want to welcome and congratulate 56 teachers of the year, from all across America.

You know, I used to say as the Governor of Texas, you can never thank a good teacher enough. Well, I'm going to try to do it as President: Thank you all, from the bottom of our hearts.

I especially want to congratulate the finalists: Christa Compton and Tonya Perry, Derek Minakami and Michele Forman, the National Teacher of the Year. I'll have a few

things more to say about Michele in a moment.

For a half century, the White House has hosted a ceremony honoring the National Teacher of the Year and the State Teachers of the Year. Every American President, since Harry Truman, has presented this award, and that's as it should be. What we honor tells the world what we value, and we value America's teachers.

"A teacher affects eternity," Henry Adams once wrote. He meant that their influence is unending. Teachers play a vital role in the intellectual and moral education of children. They teach children how to read and write, and they teach children right from wrong. They teach students to love knowledge and to disdain ignorance. Teachers inspire students, fire imaginations, nurture their natural abilities, and encourage them to explore the possibilities of life. They prepare good students to be good citizens. They also know better than anyone else they can't do it alone.

It's so important for the moms and dads of America to hear this message: Be a good parent; love your children; teach your children to read early in life; and support the teachers who are spending time with your most precious, precious part of your family.

One of my predecessors as Governor of Texas was a guy named Sam Houston. Sam Houston was a United States Senator, the Governor of two States, Texas and Tennessee. He was even a President—the President of the Republic of Texas. And yet, with all these impressive accomplishments, he wrote that being a teacher in Maryville, Tennessee, gave him a higher feeling of dignity and satisfaction than any other office or honor he ever held.

Well, this year's National Teacher of the Year, Michele Forman, demonstrates the dignity and satisfaction of teaching. Mrs. Forman teaches social studies at Middlebury Union High, in Middlebury, Vermont. She says this: "I think I have the best job in the world. Every day is something new."

Mrs. Forman arrives at school every day at 6:30 a.m., a full 2 hours before the students arrive. Three mornings a week she teaches Arabic, which she's been doing for the past 4 years. Students earn no credit by

taking the course; they attend the classes because of their love of learning—and probably, mostly because of their love of Mrs. Forman.

Michele Forman knows her subjects and has high expectations for her students. She believes there must be a mutual trust between teachers and students. She's highly regarded by her colleagues. She's a woman of boundless energy and enthusiasm. In all these ways, she is an example of excellence in education.

And so it's a high honor to present to Michele Forman the National Teacher of the Year Award.

[At this point, Mrs. Forman made brief remarks.]

The President. Well, Michele, thank you very much. In keeping the fine tradition of never missing to want an opportunity—*[laughter]*—or to waste an opportunity, let me say a few words about a pressing issue and a great opportunity for our country.

This week the United States Senate will begin debate on what's known as S-1, appropriately named because it is my number one priority, it is your number priority, and it's an education reform proposal. This is not just about another legislative debate. It's the best opportunity in a generation for having meaningful education reform come out of Washington, DC.

And we have an ambitious goal: All our children, every child in America, must have access to a safe and high quality school, so we make sure that standards are high. It's so important to raise the bar and expect the best from every child, just like you do; that results are tested—people shouldn't fear accountability systems in America. We want to know. We want to know whether children can read and write and add and subtract. And if not, we'll make sure they do early, before it is too late, and that schools are accountable.

We give more States more flexibility and freedom. We trust teachers in the classrooms, as opposed to having mandates out of Washington. We've got to trust teachers and principals to chart the path for excellence for every child; provide greater options for parents with bipartisan support for char-

ter schools or public school choice or private tutoring programs.

In separate legislation we are working for liability reform to support and protect teachers who enforce reasonable standards of conduct in their classrooms. We're encouraging more of America's best and brightest citizens, including those who have served in the Armed Forces, to become teachers. This is a project near and dear to my wife Laura's heart. Unfortunately, she's not here. I wish she was, because she could explain a lot better than I could, but she's out traveling the Nation, reminding people that one of the most noble professions ever is to be a teacher, and recruiting teachers. And she's doing such a good job, I need to send her up to the Congress to convince them to behave.

We'll increase spending on education and focus that new spending on reforming schools that aren't performing well or on a powerful reading initiative.

I support historic new levels of education funding. Yet all of us know better schools require more than just funding. And I hope the Senate hears that we need meaningful education reform by high standards, accountability. My education reform has a good balance of new dollars.

Now, one of the interesting things that historians learn—and Michele is an historian—is that the President proposes, the Congress disposes. But the truth of the matter is, the people rule. And I hope the people of America contact the Members of the Senate and insist upon a passage of a well-balanced, meaningful reform package that will enhance our teachers' ability to do what you do well, which is to teach our kids.

It's an honor for me to be here. I welcome you to the Nation's Capital. And once again, thanks from the bottom of my heart, on behalf of all of America, for doing the job you do.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:50 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

Remarks to the Environmental Youth Award Winners*April 24, 2001*

Thank you all very much. It's my honor to be here. First, Christie Todd, you're doing a great job. I knew I was going to pick—I knew she was going to do a great job when I picked her. I didn't realize how good. And she really is—I'm proud to have her on my team.

I want to thank the parents who are here. I know it's a proud moment for you, and it should be. It means you've done your job.

I always like to remind folks who are lucky enough to have a child, the most important job you'll ever have is to love your children and to be a good mom and dad. I want to thank the sponsors who are here, and I look forward to thanking you all personally after this brief speech. *[Laughter]* Please don't break out in applause. *[Laughter]*

The Congress is back, and it's good to see three fine Members of the Congress here. I thank you guys for coming: Zach Wamp of Tennessee, Mark Kirk of Illinois, and Wally Herger of California. Thank you guys for being here. I know you're here to represent your constituents, and I know you're proud of your constituents, just like we are, as well.

But most particularly, I want to thank the winners. I had the opportunity of having my picture taken with the winners, and it looks like I might have a chance to have a few more after this is over. *[Laughter]* Right, guy? *[Laughter]*

For three decades now, the Environmental Protection Agency has helped to carry out our national commitment to the wise care of the environment. The agency has worked with many private citizens who understand that each have a duty to be good stewards of the land and life around us. And that's what we're honoring today.

Interesting thing is, is that we're honoring youngsters. You would think that the old folks would be the ones leading the charge in America and many places. But it's our young who are doing so, particularly when it comes to cleaning up the environment, and for that we're grateful. It really does speak to a great future for America, I think.

And rather than going through all the impressive accomplishments, just like Christie Todd did, I do want to talk a little bit about good environmental policy. It starts with a commitment. And my administration has a commitment to clean air and clean water and good soils.

Laura and I are fortunate enough to own a ranch in central Texas. I like to remind everybody that if you own your own land, every day is Earth Day. If you live off the land—the people who care more about that than the people who live off the land—the reason I bring that up is because I want—a good policy understands the proper role of the Federal Government. The proper role of the Federal Government is to set high standards, to set goals, but it's to work with local folks to achieve those goals.

Not all wisdom is in Washington, DC, as witnessed by what took place up here. All of us in Washington don't have all of the answers to all of the problems. Our job is to work in a collaborative way with people at the local level. As Christie Todd said, we'll fund more, and we will.

We've got money in our budget to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund for the first time. It says we'll work with local folks to set aside lands that need to be protected. We've got money in our budgets to repair the national parks. Here, the Federal Government is talking about a clean world and a clean environment, and yet we're not even keeping our own parks; we're not fulfilling our own responsibilities. It seems like to me, if we want to set a good example for the rest of the country, we've got to take care of what we're—over which we're in charge. And we're going to do so at the Federal level.

We've got some regulatory policy in place that makes sense. But it says we're going to make decisions based upon sound science, not some environmental fad or what may sound good—that we're going to rely upon the best of evidence before we decide.

Ours is a policy that truly believes that technologies have advanced to the point where we can have economic growth and sound environmental policy go hand in hand. Oh, there's a lot of talk recently about energy. And for those of you in California, you know we need more energy. For those of